

IOWA ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT Participation Guidelines

This document offers guidance to IEP teams in determining if particular students meet the criteria for participating in the Iowa Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Achievement Standards.

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District and Statewide Participation

In Iowa, students with disabilities may participate in district-wide assessments in several different ways.

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| 1 | 1. Standard administration |
| | 2. Standard administration with accommodations |
| | 3. Alternate assessment |
| 2 | |
| 3 | An estimated 1% of all students |

The first way is standard participation with no accommodations. This is the way students without disabilities take part in assessment. The second way is participation with accommodations. Accommodations are changes in testing materials or procedures that permit the student with disabilities to have equal opportunities to demonstrate what they have achieved. Most students with disabilities will participate in district-wide assessments in one of these two ways.

An Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Achievement Standards is utilized for a very small number (less than 1%) of students who will meet the guidelines for participation in the alternate assessment. The following guidelines around students, instructional program, and assessment should assist IEP teams in Iowa in determining which students will participate in the alternate assessment in Iowa:

Alternate Assessment Student Participation

Student

The student has characteristics of a severe disability, including significant deficits in language and communication and adaptive behaviors. The student requires very intensive, highly specialized instruction in order to acquire knowledge, make generalizations, and/or demonstrate skills across natural environments (home, school, community, and/or workplace). Students in alternate assessment will generally be those students who are classified as Level 3. However, some students with that classification will take part in the general assessment (probably with accommodations) and some students with disabilities who have other level classifications may take part in the alternate assessment although this would be rare.

Important Discussions for IEP Teams

- *Does this student generally exhibit the learning characteristics of a student with a significant cognitive disability?*
 - These learning characteristics generally show up in how the student communicates, how he/she responds to the environment, and how he/she learns. These behaviors would be expected to be significantly different from most typical peers if a student was eligible to participate in the IAA. While there is not a “fixed” score to determine if a student participates, the IAA is targeting students who would score significantly lower than typical peers on standardized tests of knowledge and cognition (or may achieve a valid score at all). Of course this isn’t automatic. A student who tests within that range and might still be included in general assessment in one or more content areas. The same applies for adaptive behavior.
- *When discussing generalization across natural environments, once the student has been taught vocabulary in reading, does he/she know them across other settings in the school? If the student does not generalize skills, does he/she need the instruction in multiple settings to learn the skill in each setting itself?*

Instructional Program

The schools or school district’s content standards and benchmarks guide the student’s curriculum. Use of alternate achievement standards (NCLB, 2001) allows districts to extensively modify expected performance levels to allow the student to demonstrate what he or she knows and is able to do while still receiving instruction on grade level, general curriculum content. It is important to remember that the student’s IEP may address other skills that are important for that particular individual but the student’s curriculum is the same as the grade level curriculum for all students.

Important Discussions for IEP Teams

- *Has the grade level content been significantly changed in terms of the expectations for this student’s performance? Does this student’s performance within the general curriculum look significantly different from the performance of typical peers?*
 - Changes in grade level expectations must be significantly different, and does apply to students who might just be performing at a lower grade

level. Rather, the discussion of alternate assessment participation applies to students whose performance is *clearly not comparable* to typical peers even though they are accessing the same grade level content.

- *Has the grade level content been significantly changed in terms of delivery?*
 - Students in the Alternate Assessment are instructed on grade level content that has been significantly reduced in complexity, viewed in terms of alternate achievement standards, and incorporates universal design principles or other means to make the instructional content accessible to the student.

Assessment

The student is generally unable, even with accommodations, to demonstrate knowledge and skills on district-wide assessments used for the majority of students

Participation decisions should NOT be based primarily on:

- a. Poor attendance
- b. English language learner status
- c. Social, cultural, and economic difference
- d. Disruptive behavior
- e. Student reading level
- f. Expectations of poor performance
- g. Amount of time receiving special education services
- h. Low achievement in general education
- i. Categorical disability level
- j. Performance tied solely to a level, label, or cut score
- k. Location where the child receives services

Important Questions for IEP Teams. If the answer to any of the following questions is “Yes” then the student is likely not a candidate for inclusion in alternate assessment.

- *Has the student missed a lot of school and that is the cause of the low achievement?*
- *Are cultural/social and economic issues the cause of the low achievement?*
- *Is the decision about assessment participation based upon past behavior and academic performances or expectations?*
- *Is the student’s learning disability, emotional/behavioral disability, hearing disability, or visual disability, rather than cognition, impacting the ability to learn?*
- *Is the past history of special education participation (disability label, type of services delivery, placement, etc.) affecting the decision?*

The IEP team makes all assessment decisions for a particular student. No one member may make decisions for the team nor is any member’s opinion more important than the opinion of anyone else. The IEP team decision should be documented during the IEP process.

In some instances, it may be decided that a student should participate in general assessment in one content area but alternate in the other two. In these cases that decision should be noted on the IEP and specified as to which assessment will be administered for each content area.